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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: SEASONAL ETHNIC VIOLENCE ALONG MALI-NIGER BORDER

REF: NIAMEY 822

Classified By: PolCouns Peter Newman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Malian press reports of violence between Tuareg and Peuhls along the Mali-Niger border reflect a seasonal phenomenon routine since the mid-1980s, but according to contacts from the Gao region scarce resources, differing pastoral cultures, and politics in Niger have aggravated the situation. The Malian Government has dispatched 200 National Guardsmen to Gao region, and Malian local leaders are reaching out to their Nigerien counterparts to form agreements on resource sharing and curbing militias. End summary.

¶2. (C) Since the mid-1980s violence has periodically erupted between the Tuareg and Peuhl ethnic groups along Mali's border with Niger. In 2009, several attacks were highly publicized, including one near Ansongo, Mali where Malian Tuaregs killed 12 Nigerien Peuhls and close to 1,000 head of cattle in retaliation for the murders of four Tuaregs and an unknown number of cattle. The Malian National Guard sent an additional 200 troops to Gao province in August 2009 to help quell the violence.

¶3. (C) Embassy contacts from Gao region say population growth and inadequate rainfall are stretching agricultural land usage to its limits. This year, a 60 percent rainfall deficit has caused estimated losses of 30 percent of some populations' herds of cattle, sheep, and goats. Contacts note that whereas Malian Tuaregs and Peuhls tend to settle seasonally in established towns, Nigerian Peuhls, are purely nomadic with no established towns or watering holes. They use pastureland until it is exhausted then move on to new lands. With increased environmental pressures in the past 20 years, these two distinct pastoral cultures have clashed more frequently than before. Malian Tuaregs view the Nigerien Peuhl nomads as parasitic since they do not attempt to manage or improve the natural resources they are using. Competition for land and water leads both groups to attack each other and to engage in reprisals.

¶4. (C) Conflicts, generally occurring during the June-October rainy season, are allegedly due to Nigerien agricultural policy. Embassy Bamako informants claim the Nigerien government orders nomadic Peuhls off agricultural lands near the Mali-Niger border during the rainy season to increase agricultural production, and allegedly gives them small arms to facilitate their entry into Mali and use of Malian land resources. Nigerien local leaders tell their Malian counterparts the Nigerien central government protects the Peuhl militias, and when Malian law enforcement officials arrest Nigerien Peuhls accused of cattle rustling, the Nigerien government allegedly sends delegations to negotiate

the prisoners' release. The violence seems to be calming down as the 2009 rainy season comes to a close, but local political leaders from Gao are concerned that problems could expand further into the Gao region and Mopti region in coming years.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Malian government is doing what it can to improve security by sending additional National Guardsmen. Putting an end to these predictable annual conflicts, however, would require a diplomatic solution between the Malian and Nigerien central governments to better share resources and to disarm local militias on both sides of the border. End comment.

¶6. (U) Embassy Niamey cleared on this report.
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